



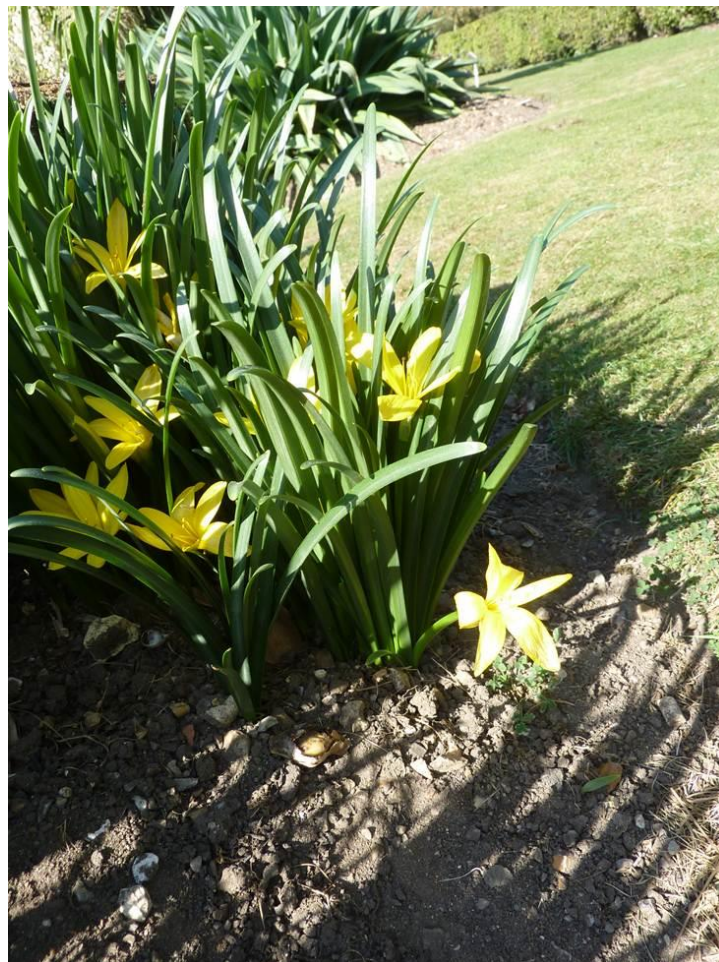
Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time A



“Lilies of the Field”

“Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. Mt. 6:28”



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Dear Jesus,

Help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go.

Flood my soul with your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
that all my life may only be a radiance of you.

Shine through me,

And be so in me that every soul I come into contact with
may feel your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus!

John Henry Cardinal Newman

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

© Mary Birmingham,
2011. All rights reserved.

Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ We still hear Jesus teaching us in the Great Sermon.
- ▶ Today Jesus teaches about abandoning our lives into God's care.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

First reading: Isaiah 49: 14-15

- ▶ Israel is in dire straits. It has been in Babylonian captivity for over seventy years. It is difficult to maintain hope and trust in God. They begin to lose faith that God will deliver them.
- ▶ Today's reading is a clarion call sounded from the heavenly throne. "God will never forsake his children! Period. End of story."
- ▶ God could no more forsake his own than a mother could forsake her nursing baby. Unthinkable, untenable and beyond imagination!
- ▶ The people began to wonder if the God in whom they had placed so much hope had utterly abandoned them.
- ▶ There is no worse emptiness than to be abandoned by a loved one.
- ▶ And now it seems as though God—the Lover of all lovers--had done just that—walked away, turned a deaf ear and ignored them altogether. Could it be true?
- ▶ God's word is definitive. "No, I have not abandoned my children. Just as a mother could not abandon her baby, I could never abandon you!"
- ▶ No further interpretation is needed in this text. How many ways could God say it? "I will never abandon my children."
- ▶ We are borne of God's own person—a child of his womb. God has no grandchildren! God has only children. Each person is a creation of God and God's children will always be cared for and held close to his heart.
- ▶ God's children are a part of God himself—and God could never deny or forget himself. It is ludicrous to consider such a possibility.
- ▶ God's love is undeserved and completely and unabashedly gratuitous.
- ▶ Sinful humanity does not deserve the lavish love of God, yet still God loves us with complete and utter abandon. How blessed we are!
- ▶ God loves us, forgives us, caresses us and offers us his own loving compassion even though we do nothing to deserve such tender attention.
- ▶ Believers should cut and paste this text from Isaiah on their morning mirror and recite it each and every day of their lives. Perhaps by the end of life we would truly believe it!
- ▶ It is the greatest love letter God has ever written to his children! Memorize it and emblazon it on your hearts!



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What is the lesson in this reading? How could this possibly be a word for us today?
- ▶ Have you ever felt abandoned by anyone? What does that tell you about how the Israelites felt in this story?
- ▶ Have you ever felt abandoned by God? What is the Good News in this story?
- ▶ Have you ever loved another person the way God loves you? Unconditionally?
- ▶ If God loved them so much, why do you suppose he did not act immediately to their cries for help? What are the implications for us today?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

- ▶ Paul faced many challenges to his authority in his ministry to God's people. He did not personally walk with the Lord so it was difficult for him to assert that he was an apostle.
- ▶ The apostles were designated *apostles* because they had personally walked and ministered with the Lord. They were first hand witnesses. Paul was not; his conversion took place after the death and resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ Paul, however, proudly and boldly asserted his apostleship because of his experience. He was a first hand witness of the Lord--the resurrected presence of Jesus the Christ.
- ▶ His experience was so profound that he unabashedly asserted his authority based on his experience of the risen Lord.
- ▶ His authority was challenged by the elite religious leaders of the community who based their authority on a special "gnosis" or knowledge.
- ▶ These highly gifted charismatic characters made it even more difficult for Paul to assert his God-given authority.
- ▶ Paul thus defined the role of apostle. An apostle was a servant—a servant of Christ—not a servant to a human institution.
- ▶ Paul's understanding of his role of servant required that he care for what had been entrusted to him—the souls of God's children—God's own possessions.
- ▶ One metaphor Paul used came from the Greek understanding of a word [*hyperetes*] that referred to those who manned the oars on the lower deck of a ship. Christ was the captain of the ship and Paul carried out his orders and helped to steer the ship in the right direction.
- ▶ Paul believed that the role of apostle was to uphold the revealed truths of God—the mysteries.
- ▶ The Corinthian community had grown weary of Paul. They were disenchanted

with him.

- ▶ He was not of the showy-preacher ilk of his contemporaries. Much like those today who seek after the best, most charismatic televangelist, the Corinthian community wanted more from Paul.
- ▶ Paul refused to be critiqued by the Corinthians. It was God's job; not theirs. God would judge the effectiveness of his ministry—not those who put their stock in preachy showmanship.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group.

- ▶ Put yourself in the place of Paul. In what way can you relate to his predicament in the Corinthian community? Have you ever felt your authority was challenged? What is Paul trying to tell them about his authority?
- ▶ What is the good news for us in Paul's assertions?
- ▶ The charismatic leaders were relying on their own gifted abilities and Paul was relying on the power and discernment of God. How are we to discern what drives us when we do God's work and follow what we think is God's call? How can we judge our own motives?
- ▶ Paul shows an uncommon courage in the face of challenges to his authority and his ministry. What are the implications for us today? Would we be as bold and as certain of our position as Paul was? Why do you suppose Paul was so certain? How might we grow in certainty like Paul?

Gospel: Matthew 6: 24-34

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Jesus was teaching his disciples a new way to live—a reorienting of life.
- ▶ Disciples are to completely abandon their lives into God's care—no matter what challenging circumstance presents itself.
- ▶ Jesus invites interior reflection: Where are you willing to place your trust? Will you trust God or will you put your trust in earthly things—money, possessions, power or prestige?

- ▶ The latter offers empty promises and delivers nothing. The former offers and delivers the truth—eternal life and life to the fullest with God.
- ▶ Faith in God requires that we participate in the God who lives within and who is active and engaged in human life. Faith is not simply a belief in the God “out there” who created the world at some unfathomable time in history. Faith in God is now; it is a present reality.
- ▶ To breathe and draw breath is to breathe in the presence of God within.
- ▶ The word *mammon* in antiquity referred to property or anything of value.
- ▶ *Mammon* it is not the name given to a false god or idol. Even though *mammon* can function like an idol; it is not an idol.
- ▶ Jesus understood this and reminded people that where their heart’s desire resides is where their God or idol resides. If a person desires intimate relationship with God, God is a priority in his or her life. If a person is caught up in riches, power and prestige, those will be his or her idol and focus and intimate relationship with God will not be a priority.
- ▶ It is difficult to resist the lure of riches no matter what form they take.
- ▶ It is better to be embraced and possessed by God rather than to be strangled and owned by one’s possessions.
- ▶ Jesus also points to worry as a distraction. When people are concerned about what will happen tomorrow they miss the God who is present right under their noses today.
- ▶ Such worry is an act of infidelity. When one is consumed by worry that person has lost faith in God’s desire to care for his children.
- ▶ Jesus reminds us that the beautiful flowers of the field want for nothing. They did nothing of their own accord to produce the beauty and fragrance they imbue. Images of fragrant meadows dance in our heads.
- ▶ Jesus then shakes his audience back to reality with a stark contrast to lilies dancing freely in a lush meadow. He insisted that “God clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown in the oven tomorrow...” The phrase, “grass of the field” was an ancient term that referred to something that had absolutely no value.
- ▶ He is reminding us that even the beauty of the flowers is transitory; the flowers will one day wither and be thrown into the fire and used for fuel. We are not to be lured by such transitory beauty and enticements!
- ▶ God’s children never need to worry about such things. They need only abandon their lives to God’s loving care.
- ▶ The ancient world was plagued with constant worry. Life was harsh. Would there be enough food? Would they be overcome by a foreign power and sold into slavery?
- ▶ Jesus insisted that no matter the situation, God’s children live in God’s kingdom and the concerns of this world are transitory. They last but a while.
- ▶ All human deprivation pales in comparison to the love and blessing God has for his children.
- ▶ When we look at the reality of the human condition and the plight of so many in the world we know that people do not fare as well as the lilies of the field. Yes,

we must plan for the future; yes, there are suffering people everywhere that we must help; yes there is poverty and famine which we must address in spite of the truth that the suffering of this world is nothing in comparison with the riches that await us.

- ▶ Some scholars suggest this pericope was presented as a consolation to all who left everything behind to follow Jesus and were totally dependent on the hospitality of others for their survival and to ministers like Paul who were persecuted for the sake of the Gospel. They indeed can take refuge and consolation in the promise of Jesus' words in today's Gospel.
- ▶ God loves us and cares for us no matter what!
- ▶ Jesus paints a tapestry of God's loving intention for the world. He gives us a glimpse of Eden—the world in perfect harmony.
- ▶ Until that world arrives we are to be the hands and feet of Christ in a broken world.
- ▶ We are to live according to the biblical justice established at the creation of the world. We are to rely on God to love us and care for our needs and in response we are to care for those who cannot care for themselves.
- ▶ Today's gospel is an invitation for us to ask ourselves if and how we are good stewards of the creation we have been given. Do we foster harmony in God's creation or are we a destructive force? It is a question we will be asked at the end of our days. How will we respond?

Behold the Lilies of the Field

Behold the lilies of the field,
they neither toil nor sow;
yet God does all things needful
yield
that they may live and grow.

Not Solomon in glory shone
like one of these poor flowers,
that look to God and God alone
for sunshine and for showers.

And does his mercy value less
the offspring of his grace?

And will a Father's love not bless
the child that seeks his face?

He is our Father, and he knows
his earthly children's need:
on all our daily wants and woes
he looks with careful heed.

O then away with fear and care
for all that may betide;
and turn to God in trustful prayer,
and in his love confide.

Words: Cecilia M Caddell (1813-1877)
Music: Flora (Robin Treeby Sheldon, 1932-);
© The Church Society, Dean Wace House,
Rosslyn Road, Watford, Herts, WD1 7EY



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What spoke to you the most in today's Gospel?
- ▶ In what way, if any, do you abandon your life into God's care? What are the obstacles that keep you from such abandonment?
- ▶ Discuss the challenges and difficulties of the distraction of mammon in your life. What can you do to avoid such distractions?
- ▶ How do we deal with the fact that God does not always care for us the way we want to be cared for—God does not always answer our prayers the way we want them answered. What does this Gospel have to say to us about that reality?
- ▶ How might we deal with the previous reality in our everyday lives?
- ▶ Today's gospel is an invitation for us to ask ourselves how we are good stewards of the creation we have been given. Do we foster harmony in God's creation or are we a destructive force? It is a question we will be asked at the end of our days. If God were to ask you that question right now how would you respond? Do you care for the lilies of the field or do you not care what happens to God's creation—people, the environment, etc.
- ▶ What does today's Gospel teach us about Jesus' relationship with us?
- ▶ What is the challenge of this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the present day implications of this Gospel?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat opening prayer OR use a minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

Appendix

Many times over the past twelve years I have grumbled when this reading is proclaimed. I ask, “Why does God care more for the lilies of the field than he does for my child who is so ill?” I have struggled and struggled and in my questioning God has invited me to grow in trust, in faith and in the assurance that he not only cares more for my child than the lilies of the field but he walks with him in his tortured state.

When he is at his worst as a result of his illness, glimpses of God’s love for him exude from deep within his troubled soul. His illness recently got the best of him and things were very bad. From the ashes of ugliness arose the awareness of that ugliness and a deep humility on his part that there is a better way to live. He expressed sorrow and forgiveness in God’s own words and like a small child asked me to be patient with him in the midst of the hell he was living. Light shining through the severe darkness; a troubled, extremely sick young man of faith desperate to find his mooring, was upheld by the hand of God and assured he was loved.

If God can be found in the midst of schizophrenia God can be found anywhere. The last twelve years have taught me to trust and believe that God not only hears our cries for our son, he cries with us and holds him up when he is at his deepest bottom. In his words, God is so good!”



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Life Issues
Holy Orders
Stewardship
Church and Ecclesiology
Church Structure

Morality
Moral Decision Making
Revelation I or II
Prayer
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

LIFE ISSUES

Isaiah's famous "Could a mother forget her child?" sequence is a logical time for us to consider the dignity of life from womb to tomb. "The human person is a child of God's womb—God's very own creation. God's children will never, ever be forgotten." (Mary Birmingham, *Word and Worship Workbook Year A*, Paulist Press, 403) God created us with human dignity, mirrored in his own image. If we uphold every person's equality and dignity in the eyes of God we must hold and uphold that all life is sacred—from womb to tomb. Thus today is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about LIFE. Today's doctrinal session will focus on LIFE ISSUES.

HOLY ORDERS

Paul teaches the community about what it means to be an apostle. He reminds the people that an apostle is a servant of the people. Much like a steward is responsible to care for someone else's property. The apostle is a steward charged with caring for the souls of God's people. Jesus continues his Sermon setting forth the blueprint for living in the kingdom. The reign of God required leadership after Jesus was gone. Jesus cleverly prepares his disciples to assume that leadership. He sets forth the catechism to be emblazoned on their hearts—to be remembered for all time. He takes believers into the heart of God's intention for the Christian community. Jesus called the apostles to lead the people after he departed from this world, the fruits of which we still experience today in the sacrament of Holy Orders. Today it is most fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of HOLY ORDERS.

STEWARDSHIP

Today Jesus praises the grandeur of creation. It is a reminder of the covenant God forged with the human race that we are called to be good stewards of God's creation—his children, the poor and oppressed, and the earth. We are to care for what God has entrusted to us. It is thus an appropriate time for us to consider what the Church teaches about STEWARDSHIP.

CHURCH and ECCLESIOLOGY

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom and Matthew proclaimed Jesus. Jesus is setting forth the blueprint for living in the kingdom. The reign of God required leadership after Jesus was gone. Jesus cleverly prepares his disciples to assume that leadership. He sets forth the catechism to be emblazoned on their hearts—to be remembered for all time. He takes believers into the heart of God's intention for the Christian community. Paul sets forth an ecclesiology today—a theology of what it means to be called the people of God—to be called the CHURCH. It is thus a most appropriate occasion to focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom and Matthew proclaimed Jesus. Jesus is setting forth the blueprint for living in the kingdom. The reign of God required leadership after Jesus was gone. Jesus cleverly prepares his disciples to assume that leadership. He sets forth the catechism to be emblazoned on their hearts—to be remembered for all time. He takes believers into the heart of God's intention for the Christian community. Jesus called the apostles and set in motion something that would have a legacy lasting over two thousand years—the CHURCH and its STRUCTURE. Today it is most fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH STRUCTURE.

MORALITY

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount continues and he once again presents his catechism on how to live the moral life in the kingdom he came to establish. If we are to live the moral life we must understand the commitment we are making. It is thus important that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about morality.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount continues and he once again presents his catechism on how to live the moral life in the kingdom he came to establish. If we are to live the moral life we must understand the commitment we are making. How then do we know what is moral? How do we know how to make moral decisions? Today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about MORAL DECISION MAKING.

REVELATION I or II

Every Sunday is an appropriate time to focus our attention on God's manifestation to the world through Sacred Scripture. Jesus' primary thesis is to preach the kingdom. Matthew's primary thesis is to preach Jesus—the revelation of God. Today Jesus continues his catechism on how to live a moral life in the kingdom he came to establish.

He expresses God's will for those who would become his disciples. He reveals God's intention. Divine revelation is given to us to reveal God's intention for the human race. God speaks to us through his Word and reminds of us the God/human relationship since the beginning of time. Today's liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about REVELATION.

PRAYER

The heart of Jesus' message today is interior disposition. Jesus expects more than mere adherence to the law from his disciples. The only way disciples will be able to make that leap is through a life of prayer and intimate relationship with God in Christ. Today's liturgy therefore is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches us about PRAYER.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.